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ABSTRACT

Insights from research on young children's concepts and attitudes about poetry can assist teachers as they develop appropriate instructional poetry programs. Research reveals that teachers' choices of poems often do not correlate well with children's choices. Characteristics preferred by children include: themes important to children, humorous content, rhymed verse, sharp sensory images, limericks, and narratives. Characteristics least preferred include: poems with mature or serious themes, unrhymed verse, abstract and symbolic images, haiku, and lyric poetry. Trained evaluators rated poems and chose 26 poems as being the most suited to children's tastes--21 of these poems became the basis for the Daily Oral Reading of Poetry program. Recall activities, sequencing activities, and brainstorming new verses are some of the 12 activities that link poems to reading and writing. Any known verse can form the basis of an 11-step top-down reading lesson. From a review of descriptive literature related to poetry instruction six recommendations emerge, including daily exposure of students to poetry, and oral reading of poetry by teachers at appropriate times. The Daily Oral Reading of Poetry program was structured so that teachers introduced one new poem on a daily basis for four weeks, producing significant gains in children's concepts and attitudes about poetry. The descriptive literature on the teachers's role in poetry instruction reveals one critical fact--a single teacher may leave a longterm impression (positive or negative) on how a child feels about poetry. (An article entitled "Reading, 'Riting, and Rhyme--Give Your Classroom Poetry Time!" is attached.) (RS)

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Poetic Links to Literacy

Presented by Dr. Michael Ford, UW Oshkosh
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BACKGROUND: Developing an appreciation and understanding of poetry in children is a goal articulated throughout the elementary school experience. One only needs to examine the commercial materials, curricular guides, statements from professional organizations and opinions of educational authorities that shape and influence reading and language arts instruction to find widespread evidence of this goal. The worthiness of the goal is defensible on two fronts. First because of the unique way this genre is crafted and presented, poetry needs to be studied for poetry' sake. Literary experiences possible through exposure to poetry are not accessible to students fed a steady diet of prose. Secondly, poetry is being increasingly recognized as a valuable tool to lead students toward other learning about themselves, their language and their world.

Unfortunately, the schools have fallen short of achieving this very worthy goal. Surveys indicate that less than one percent of the adult population reads poetry on a regular basis. Despite the fact that many young children enter school with a positive attitude toward poetry activities, they often leave school without developing a mature understanding or a longterm appreciation for this unique genre.

The purpose of this presentation is to assist teachers as they develop effective instructional poetry programs to use in their classrooms. They will become familiar with the results of a recent comprehensive study of young children's concepts and attitudes about poetry. Insights from this research can assist teachers as they develop appropriate instructional poetry programs. They will also become familiar with a successfully field-tested instructional poetry program called The Daily Oral Reading of Poetry. This program requires a minimum amount of teacher training, planning time and implementation concerns yet yielded significant results in improving children's concepts and attitudes about poetry. (Results are described in the 1987 dissertation Young Children's Concepts and Attitudes about Poetry by Dr. Ford, which is available for loan from the University of Iowa.)

THREE CRITICIAL COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE POETRY INSTRUCTION:

THE POEMS: Research reveals that teachers' choices of poems often do not correlate well with the choices of children. Extensive poetry preference research has been done with elementary students which provides guidelines for assisting teachers in choosing poems that will appeal to their students. The following is a summary of that research:

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Characteristics preferred:

CONTENT -- themes important to children; favorite specific topics -- animals, holidays, childhood experiences; plot and action-filled; familiar topics; humor and nonsense.
ELEMENTS -- rhymed verse, definite rhythm, sharp sensory images, sense of physical movement.
FORM -- limericks, narratives, nursery rhyme format; appropriate length; contemporary.

Characteristics least preferred:

CONTENT -- mature, serious, disturbing themes; abstract topics; talky poems; unfamiliar topics; perceived as dull or boring.
ELEMENTS -- unrhymed verse; lack of rhymic variety; little creative use of sound; figurative language, abstract, symbolic images; little sense of physical movement.
FORM -- haiku, lyric; too long, too short; datedness.

Using these guidelines, trained raters evaluated ninety poems and the following poems were found to be the most suitable for young children (K-3) [on a scale of 0-20 all of these poems were rated 17 or higher indicating they contained many or most of the preferred characteristics]:

Spaghetti (Silverstein)*
Miss Hocket (Anonymous limerick)*
The Creature in the Classroom (Prelutsky)*
Don't Ever Cross a Crocodile (Starbird)*
The Crocodile's Toothache (Silverstein)*
Rhinocerous Stew (Luton)*
Me-Stew (Silverstein)*
Pumberly Pott's Unpredictable Niece (Prelutsky)*
Dreadful (Silverstein)*
The Spangled Pandemonium (Brown)*
The Wozzit (Prelutsky)*
My Dinosaur's Day in the Park (Winthrop)*
Messy Room (Silverstein)*
Herbert Glerbett (Prelutsky)*
There was an Old Lady (Lee)*
Fancy Dive (Silverstein)*
Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout (Silverstein)*
Twickham Tweer (Prelutsky)*
Sick (Silverstein)*
The Yipiyuk (Silverstein)*
Boa Constrictor (Silverstein)*
Captain Hook (Silverstein)
The Monster in my Closet (Winthrop)
Mother Doesn't Want a Dog (Viorst)
Peanut-Butter Sandwich (Silverstein)
The Monster's Pet (Moore)

*These twenty-one poems became the basis for the Daily Oral Reading of Poetry program.

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Linking Poems to Reading and Writing Activities

1) Recall Activities: Many poems contain lists of items and events. Students might enjoy trying to recall all the various things that were described in a poem.

2) Sequencing Activities: Once lists of things or events from a poem have been identified, students can work to put them in order practicing their sequencing abilities.

3) Brainstorming new verses fitting the poem's pattern: After assisting students to identify patterns in certain poems, encourage them to come up with other examples that could have happened in the poem based on this pattern.

4) Creating new verse changing the poem's pattern: Students can also be encouraged to alter the pattern from one poem to establish a new pattern for additional brainstorming and writing activities.

5) Choral and echo reading: The unison effect of having all students read parts of a poem together chorally or the modeling effect of having students echo parts of the poem read aloud are two good ways to provide students with oral fluency practice without all the risks of other oral reading situations.

6) Repeated reading techniques: Poems can become the focus of repeated reading activities. The rhythm, rhyme and repetition built into poetry may be more effective in assisting students improve their fluency.

7) Discussing interesting vocabulary words: The rich language of poems provides a meaningful context for discussing a variety of interesting words with students.

8) Progressive Cloze activities: Using part of a familiar poem written on a chalkboard or written out on individual word cards, gradually remove words from the view of the students. Have them continue to recite the full poem even with words missing. By directing their attention to words left for viewing, a teacher can provide students with repeated exposure to key sight words.

9) Reconstructing the poem using mixed up individual word cards based on the text from the poem: Putting the individual words contained in phrases and sentences together so that they make sense is a good way for students to practice cohesion comprehension.

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10) Story mapping techniques applied to narrative poems: A familiar narrative poem is a good tool for introducing students to strategies involving the use of story mapping.

11) Self-illustrated books with a line of verse on each page: By taking a short piece of verse language from a poem, song or fingerplay; teachers can help students create "instant readers." Put one line of text from the verse on the bottom of a blank sheet of paper. Have students draw a picture that goes along with the text. Staple the pages together with a cover and you've created a book students can read instantly.

12) Illustrating story wheels constructed to accompany a narrative poem: Using a circle divided into an appropriate number of "pie sections," have students read each stanza from a longer narrative poem and create a picture that goes with that part of the poem. Keep doing that throughout the poem and when students are done they will have a circle filled with images from the poem. It's a good way to help them practice the imagery skills that are needed for comprehension of text without pictures.

Any known verse can form the basis of a TOP-DOWN reading lesson for students (especially novice readers and less-abled readers.)

1. Select a familiar verse text

2. Introduce text (or a big chunk of text)
on chart paper like a shared "book" experience

3. Invite students to chorally read the text

4. Provide students their own copies and invite rereadings

5. Once comfortable with the whole poem,
place the lines from the poem on sentence strips.

6. Work with the poem at the line level.

7. Once comfortable with the text at the line level,
place phrases from the poem on sentence strips.

8. Work with the poem at the phrase level.

9. Once comfortable with the text at the phrase level,
place words from the poem on individual cards.

10. Work with the text at the word level.

11. Once familar with the words from the poem,
use those words as the basis for word part instructional activities.

THE METHODOLOGY: A review of descriptive literature related to poetry instruction reveals the following recommendations:

1. Students need to be exposed to poetry on a daily basis.
2. Oral reading of appropriate poems by teachers is one of the best ways to expose children to poetry.
3. In the beginning, an emphasis should be placed on aesthetic enjoyment of the poems instead of academic analysis of the poems.
4. The terminology related to poetry should be used when poems are being shared. Many young children are not even familiar with the terms "poem," poet," and "poetry."
5. The poem should be the primary focus of the poetry experience.
6. Teachers should avoid many practices which are often used but tend to be linked with negative attitudes about poetry (forced memorization, endless questioning, required performance, assigned readings, overuse in one setting, isolated units, etc.)

The Daily Oral Reading of Poetry program was structured so that teachers introduced one new poem on a daily basis for four weeks according to the following basic lesson format:

1. Prior to the lesson, review the poem and practice reading it aloud.
2. Secure a quiet large group setting to share the poem.
3. After gaining the attention of the children, set up the poem using a simple listening set.
4. Introduce the poem using the title and the poet's name. Be sure to use terms like poem, poetry and poet.
5. Orally share the poem with enthusiasm and expression.
6. Following the poem, use an appropriate follow-up activity. Let children's reactions guide your follow-up to the reading.
7. As possible reread the selection, as well as other favorite poems already introduced, to the children.

Teachers were encouraged to incorporate the poetry reading into an already existing daily routine such as opening activities or oral literature. Lessons usually lasted between five or ten minutes. After four weeks of conducting the pilot program, significant gains were noticed in the young children's concepts and attitudes about poetry.

Twenty-one lessons structured according to these guidelines, using the poems previously identified, are contained in the Daily Oral Reading of Poetry Program Teacher's Manual.

THE TEACHER: The descriptive literature related to the teacher's role in poetry instruction reveals one very critical fact -- a single teacher may be able to leave a longterm impression on how a child feels about poetry. Unfortunately, that influence can be both positive and negative. If a teacher is armed with appropriate poems and an educationally sound methodology, then the remaining ingredient they need is enthusiasm for poetry.

THE KEY TO IMPACTING POSITIVELY ON STUDENTS' CONCEPTS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT POETRY IS DAILY EXPOSURE TO GOOD POEMS FROM AN ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHER!

Reading, 'riting, and rhyme– give your classroom poetry time!

by Michael P. Ford

Michael P. Ford, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of education in the Reading Education Department at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. He is a contributing writer to Reading Today.

Many Whole Language teachers are rediscovering what a friend poetry can be in integrated reading and writing classrooms. Because of their rhythmic, rhyming and repetitive language, poems have a predictable quality that often makes them easily accessible to young readers and writers. Through the daily oral sharing of a few highly appealing poems, teachers can quickly provide children with a repertoire of familiar verses. These poems can eventually become springboards to successful, enjoyable literacy experiences. Once children have become familiar with several poems, teachers will discover many possible reading-writing extensions using those poems. This article explores four possible extensions related to patterned writing, cohesion, vocabulary, and self-illustrated books.

Patterned Writing

Teachers who regularly expose children to poetry are destined to leave a lasting impact on writing programs. Children who are familiar with a poem often use that poem as a resource when they write. To begin with, exposure to poetry might be the first step in encouraging young writers to experiment with this genre. Some children's initial attempts at writing may begin with trying to recreate familiar poems from memory. Other children may adapt topics, ideas, or language phrases first encountered in these verses. The easily identifiable patterns of many poems are one of the most valuable qualities poetry offers children. These patterns can be borrowed by young writers to provide frameworks for additional writing experiences.

Patterned Writing sample:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses and
all the King's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again

Bumpy Lumpy bounced off his bed.
Bumpy Lumpy fell on his head.
All of his family rushed into his room,
surprised to see what caused the big boom!

Cohesion Activities

Familiar poems can become a meaningful context in which children can practice their skills in sentence level comprehension (cohesion). After children have become familiar with a poem to the point that its text has been virtually memorized, teachers can write each individual word from the verse on an index card. With multiple stanza poems, teachers may want to write the words from each stanza on a different set of colored index cards—white for verse one, green for verse two, orange for verse three, etc. Either in teams or individually, children take each set of cards and see if they can rearrange the text so that it makes sense. If differences occur between the rearrangements and the original texts, a teachable moment can be seized to discuss how and why the two meanings are different. By putting the text back together so that it makes sense, children demonstrate their knowledge of how words work at the sentence level.

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Vocabulary Activities

Using the sets of cards created for the cohesion activities, teachers can also help children improve their sight vocabularies. Progressive cloze activities can be structured by placing the cards in order on a pocket chart. The students can be guided in chorally reading the verse as the teacher points at each individual word. As the group repeats each reading of the familiar verse, the teacher can turn over some of the word cards to the blank side while leaving the remaining words exposed. Eventually only one or two important sight words may be left exposed. By continuing to point at the cards during each rereading, teachers can help to increase children's awareness of those key vocabulary words.

Self-Illustrated Books

Whole Language teachers can easily assist children in turning familiar rhymed verses into self-illustrated books to be added to personal and classroom libraries. Since these books are based on rhymed verses that are already a part of the children's oral language, they can be read successfully as soon as they are created. The rhymed verse chosen for the book could be the lyrics of a simple song, the words of a finger play or playground chant, or the text of a short poem like a nursery rhyme. Students can copy a few lines of the text at the bottom of blank pages of paper until the entire verse has been transcribed. Students can then add their own illustrations to go along with the text on each page, and the completed pages can be given simple bindings. In very little time, the children will have created a whole library of instant reading books built on familiar verses of poetry.

These are just a few ideas for Whole Language teachers to use in exploring the possibilities of poetry in their classrooms. Whether it becomes the predictable text for successful reading experiences, a friendly resource to use during writing experiences, or just enjoyed for its own sake, poetry deserves a prominent place in the Whole Language classroom. ■

Teachers who regularly expose children to poetry are destined to leave a lasting impact on writing programs.

Look, Jane, look.
See Sally teach.
See Sally teach *Whole Language!*

by Nancy Childress Corriveau

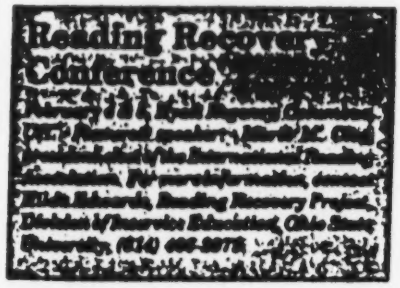
From my preschool years to my years as an educator, I have been exposed to a wide range of learning materials. At the age of five, I was the model for Sally in my father's illustrations in the Scott, Foresman basal series about Sally, Dick, and Jane. As "Sally" I was one of the subjects in a sight-word approach to reading.

Later, as a teacher, I brought the world of phonics into the classroom to supplement the basal program. Finally, during my years of graduate work, I became familiar with the Whole Language approach to reading.

In retrospect, I see an integration of programs that really work becoming widely used in schools throughout the country. What a wonderful way to integrate spelling, unit themes, finger plays, jingles and songs, phonics and sight words, and art. The children truly have a sense of participation in creating Big Books.

The Wright Group has everything a teacher needs to set up a program in the classroom. I was thrilled to find a company that makes the products, conducts training workshops, and promotes this wonderful, contagious technique. ■

Nancy Childress Corriveau is a Whole Language elementary school teacher from Gilmanton, New Hampshire.



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